Football prospects were bright in the fall of 1962, as Coach Jess Neely had engineered a personnel switch which left sports-writers groping for their thesauruses to find snappy synonyms for "genius." He had changed Randy Kerbow, a fine sprintout passer and runner, from quarterback to tailback, leaving Billy Cox and soph Walter McReynolds to battle it out for the starting quarterback spot.

The dream triple-threat backfield combination lasted about four minutes of the fall Blue-Gray game. Cox was lost for the year by a knee protest, and Kerbow was out with a wrenching knee. And unheralded Soph Gene Fleming was tabbed for starting tailback duty.

The outlook was equally bright in the fall of 1963. Cowboy Gene Walker had wiped the Hull-Daisetta dust off his boots and romped through a fantastic freshman season. Two games after the season started, Gene Fleming, an unheralded junior, was starting at tailback instead of Walker, and stayed there all season.

Spectacular Plays Become commonplace

This year, prospects are shinier than ever, as Walker has been shifted to fullback, and Paul Piper, an excellent runner who scored the tying touchdown on a 49-yard sprint against Texas as a soph, has switched to tailback. But Piper has been hampered by a broken hand, and the starting tailback has been Gene Fleming, an unheralded senior.

But such has been the career of one of the most colorful but least noticed backs in Rice history. The working press usually looks for the spectacular to write about, and Fleming's spectacular plays are so frequent that they are nearly commonplace.

But the kickoff always finds Fleming in the starting backfield, which is pretty good for a man who has never changed position, but has only this year been issued a number he can call his own. He takes the field in number 45 this year, after wearing number 18 his sophomore year.

Fleming's reliability, very much like his omnipresence, can not be questioned. probably because it is usually ignored. But it was Fleming who caught the 17-yard screen pass for the tying TD in the upset 6-6 game with LSU in 1962, and who caught the 45-yard pass in the 21-12 romping of the Tigers last year.

A Silver Spoon, But Lots of Fun

When Russell Wayt fumbled the ball on the scoring drive against Arkansas last season, it was Fleming who fell on it for an eight yard gain. And it was Fleming who intercepted the Piker pass late in the last quarter to save the game. Likewise, it was Fleming who provided the only bright moment in the A&M contest when he ran the opening kickoff back for a touchdown. But Fleming takes it all with a grain of salt. "I guess I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth." But he couldn't care less about the snubbing he gets when publicity is handed out.

"Football's still fun for me, and I'd like to play until it stops being fun and starts being a job."

"And I'm the world's worst loser," he declares. "My wife will tell you that. If she beats me at cards, I'll throw the cards all over the place.

"But I'm the world's worst loser," he declares. "My wife will tell you that. If she beats me at cards, I'll throw the cards that I begin to worry."